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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8654

INFO RUEHWH/WESTERN HEMISPHERIC AFFAIRS DIPL POSTS PRIORITY

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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: HONDURAN PRESIDENT ZELAYA POSTPONES CREDENTIALING
OF AMBASSADOR LLORENS AT LAST MINUTE; CALLS LATER TO
APOLOGIZE

Classified By: Ambassador Hugo Llorens, reasons 1.4 (b & d)

11. (U) Honduras awoke to radio reports September 12 that President Manuel "Mel" Zelaya would not receive the credentials of U.S. Ambassador Hugo Llorens that afternoon as planned, per a communiqu from the Presidential Palace. By eight o'clock, the press reports claimed to quote the President and his Private Secretary as saying the move was in solidarity with the presidents of Bolivia and Venezuela, who had expelled the U.S. ambassadors to those countries.

12. (U) The response to the surprise news was rapid and fierce: on the popular morning political talk show "Frente a Frente," Nationalist presidential candidate Mario Canahuati called for impeachment, and the host asked "what is the military waiting for? They must decide whether they serve the good of the country or the good of Manuel Zelaya." The Embassy received many calls from political figures and other contacts expressing their opposition to the President's decision. The Presidential Palace issued an announcement that they would hold a press conference to explain the decision of the President at 11:00 am.

13. (U) By the time Ambassador Llorens's flight arrived at midday, the Presidential Palace had softened their rhetoric somewhat, confirming that the President had postponed receiving the credentials of all three ambassadors scheduled, in solidarity with Bolivian president Morales, but adding that he would instruct his Foreign Minister to meet with Ambassador Llorens on Monday, September 15 to discuss the best date and means to reschedule the credentialing ceremony. A Diplomatic Note sent to the Embassy merely stated that the credentialing would be postponed until a later date.

4 (C) Using talking points based on ref emails, DCM reached out to a variety of Honduran officials, warning that there would be serious consequences if Zelaya continued to follow the same line. Those called included Congressional President Roberto Micheletti, who said he would carry our message directly to the President.

15. (C) Finally, late in the afternoon, President Zelaya called Ambassador Llorens directly to apologize for the "unpleasant circumstances" relating to the postponement of the credentialing ceremony. He said that the postponement

was related to pressures he had received regarding "the situation in the south," clearly speaking about Bolivia. Zelaya said he wanted to move beyond this and said that Ambassador Llorens should expect a call from the Foreign Minister on Monday to set up a firm date next week to present credentials. He said he hoped that we might do this on Tuesday or Wednesday. Micheletti, who was with the President, then took the phone to welcome the Ambassador to Honduras.

¶4. (C) Comment: President Zelaya's decision to cancel the credentialing took place sometime between 12:30 a.m. and the early hours of the morning. Perhaps this in itself explains his decision and his efforts throughout the day to move away from his first rhetoric. Zelaya is clearly seduced by the idea of joining Chavez and Morales' "struggle," but was probably sobered up by the strong reaction of almost everyone in Honduras and our warning that he was going too far. End comment.
LLORENS